

Author records Presbyterians' history

By JIM GERSBACH

When Milt Bona wrote the story of the first 100 years of St. John's Presbyterian Church in Camas, half of the history he had lived himself.

Bona, a member of the St. John's congregation since 1932, began writing a church history in 1978 in anticipation of the church's

centennial this year.

He pored over church records and talked with older members of the congregation to piece together the church's history.

After devoting more than 1,000 hours and six drafts, Bona had his work published in Camas this June. So far a couple hundred copies of the 80-

page book have been sold, said Bona.

Copies are still available at the church office at 1206 Birch Street, he said.

The book offers a rare look at the life of a church from its inception to the present day.

Founded in December of 1883 by a Scottish immigrant who invited the town's six Presbyterians to

worship in his storeroom, the tiny congregation eventually built the first church in the newly-founded town of LaCamas.

Over the years the church grew in membership to several hundred, and even supported missions abroad and elsewhere in the United States.

That generosity is one

characteristic author Bona said is characteristic of the church's members.

"We give better than the average church probably," said the retired editor of the Camas Post-Record.

His book chronicles the church's admirable record responding to emergencies such as the 1964 Alaska earthquake to the sponsorship of boat people

from Southeast Asia in the 1970s.

Bona said the church today is also friendly and exceptionally stable. The church has triple the percentage of members who've attended for 50 years or more as does a much larger Presbyterian church in Vancouver.

"It's a church home with lots of memories," said Bona, who transferred his membership to St. John's when he moved to Camas from his hometown of Tacoma in early 1932.

He and his wife, Beatrice, had their son and daughter baptized in the church. Bona also served on the church's building committee at one time.

"It's kind of a second home to me," said the 75 year old.

Bona said the response to his book, whose printing was paid for by the church, has been very good. With hundreds of names of

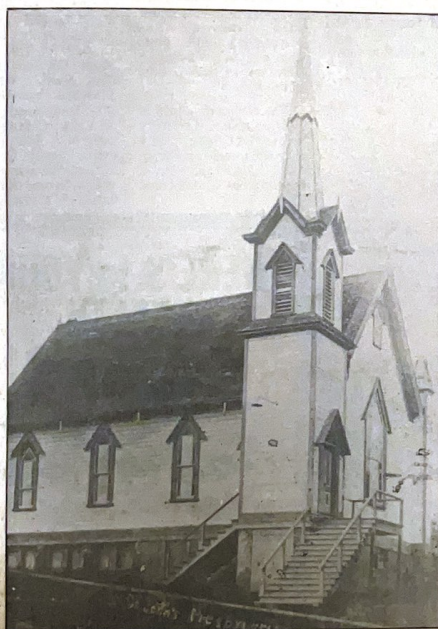
active members, pastors and missionaries listed, most longtime residents are sure to recognize a few names from the book.

Among the names is that of Elizabeth Currie, whose parents were prominent church members. Currie went as a Presbyterian missionary to India in 1932 and served there for many

years.

She spoke last Sunday at the church's Centennial service, traveling from Duarte, Calif., where she is retired.

Present in the congregation were Marge Blake and Maysie Duffin, granddaughters of Aeneas and Elizabeth McMaster.



OLD ST. JOHN'S—The St. John's Presbyterian Church as it looked in 1920. Dedicated in 1886, the original building had no steeple, bell tower or basement and was literally a "church in the wildwood." Photos courtesy of Milt Bona.



CHURCH FOUNDER—Aeneas McMaster, a Scotsman from Glasgow, organized the six Presbyterians living in Camas in 1883 into a congregation which later grew into the St. John's Church.



FOUNDING MOTHER—Elizabeth McMaster was the wife of St. John's founder. She was the mother of the community's first school teacher, Elizabeth McMaster Duffin.